

## WHERE HAVE ALL THE RED WOLVES GONE?

### Reintroduction and Recovery

Recovery efforts for red wolves have a special urgency. Although some research indicates that the wolves of Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada may, in fact, be the same species as red wolves (but a separate subspecies), the evidence is not conclusive and the debate among biologists continues. Many researchers think the red wolf of eastern North Carolina represents the only wild population in the world. Unlike gray wolves, red wolves therefore face a real and imminent threat of extinction.

Because their numbers had been severely reduced by 1970, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service established a captive breeding program for the red wolf in 1973. Over a period of eight years, biologists captured over 400 wolf-like canids from coastal Louisiana and Texas. Of these, only 43 met morphological standards and were taken to the Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in Tacoma, Washington. Breeding experiments resulted in 14 of these 43 being certified as good red wolves. Fourteen animals stood between extinction and recovery. The future of the red wolf was in the hands of the captive breeding specialists, who were careful to keep these animals from becoming too dependent on humans. No one knew, however, whether the wild instincts of the red wolf could be maintained over several generations in captivity.

In 1987, four pairs of red wolves were released in the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern North Carolina. Early releases resulted in a high mortality rate, but despite setbacks, the wolves produced the first litter of pups in the wild in 1988. By 1993, red wolves were successfully residing in on many other public and private lands in northeastern North Carolina. Reintroduction in North

Carolina has been successful in many aspects, but the future is not secure.

In 1991, Red Wolf Recovery efforts began in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee. Despite some of the successes in North Carolina, the wolves failed to establish home ranges within the National Park boundaries and pup mortality was high due to disease, parasites, and malnutrition. In October of 1998, plans were announced to terminate the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Red Wolf Program. The remaining wolves were be captured and relocated.

A few red wolves also currently live in the wild on three islands in the Southeast. In fact, the very first red wolf release in the wild took place on Bull's Island, part of Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, off the coast of South Carolina. Many release techniques were tested there before the wolves were released in Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. The other two islands that red wolves live on are St. Vincent Island National Wildlife Refuge and Cape St. George Island, both off the panhandle of Florida. Red wolves are important for island ecosystems, since they prey on rabbits which eat protective dune vegetation and raccoons which eat endangered sea turtle eggs.

For generations there was no far traveling. The unseen walls of lost habitat became the chain link of breeding pens. The great skills went unused. Sharp sight, keen hearing, shape-changing stealth. Great endurance, silent speed over forest litter, tolerance of the deepest cold....Generations without a hunt, without the joyous chase and the muzzle-bloody dance around the wide-eyed deer.

Generations without a proper den. The young knew nothing of the world. Had no wildness in their hearts, no weather in their fur. Did not know the proper seasons – the short staccato southern winter, the long soft spring, the muggy summer, and the invigorating autumn....Where was all that? How to pass that on to the fast-growing young confined in cages?

...After three generations, all of the old ones were dead and there was not a wild red wolf in the world. Only shadows of wolves. Pale flames of red wolf spirit licked the cages. The soul of the wild wolf nursed her young from afar. The wolf clan keened. Hunters wandered. Ravens held aloof. Even black bears turned their great heads to listen to the final silence.

Then the red wolf returned to the old places, freed."

Christopher Camuto, Another Country  
Another Country

## THE RED WOLF'S FUTURE: THE LONG WAY HOME

### A Cautious Optimism

Red wolves are special. They are the only large predators to date that have been declared extinct in the wild, bred in captivity, and successfully reintroduced to a portion of their former range. Bringing the red wolf back from the brink of extinction has been a pioneering venture, and thanks to the efforts of the people who worked diligently for years to ensure that red wolves would once again live in the wild, there is now hope and cautious optimism. The future of the red wolf is not, however, secure. Although red wolf numbers continue to rise slowly, the reintroduction effort faces challenges. First, the options for red wolf release sites are limited. Large tracts of wild lands are scarce in the eastern United States, and human density is high. Secondly, more than half of the population of red wolves live in captivity. Because of their limited numbers in the wild, the danger of interbreeding with coyotes still exists, and the red wolf continues to face the possible loss of its genetic identity.

*"The wolf, I believe, is our teacher. But the wolf is also in competition with the people for the land, for the wilderness. Maybe that is why there is resentment. But I wonder, what do people want in the future? What is their vision? Will the world consist only of vast cities and factory farms? Will there only be pockets of wild animals preserved in parks and zoos? And if that happens, what will we become?"*

*Teresa tsimmo Martino*  
*The Wolf The Woman The Wilderness*

## WHY SHOULD RED WOLVES BE PROTECTED?

*"In the beginning, the people say, the Dog was put on the mountain and the Wolf beside the fire. When the winter came the Dog could not stand the cold, so he came down to the settlement and drove the Wolf from the fire. The Wolf ran to the mountains, where it suited him so well that he prospered and increased."*

*James Mooney*  
*"Myths of the Cherokee"*

The red wolf was once the top predator in its habitat. Writings dating back several centuries refer to wolves similar to the red wolf in what is now the southeastern United States. Many researchers believe that red wolves have shared the North American continent with humans for thousands of years. Native Americans revered the wolf. The red wolf was known as "Wa'ya" to the Cherokee; the "Ani'-Wa'ya" or Wolf people were the principal clan.

Summit predators play a positive role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. They help to ensure the natural hierarchy of animal species by keeping the numbers of prey populations in balance. Rather than eliminating large predators, humans must make a concerted effort to preserve them as necessary elements in regulating the food chain.

Perhaps the most important reason for protecting red wolves is the awareness that every species has intrinsic worth. The red wolf is a unique animal that contributes to the overall biodiversity of the ecosystem. But it has an aesthetic value as well as a practical one. Red wolves are beautiful. If they vanish from existence, we humans as a species are diminished. For all these reasons, we must protect and preserve this critically endangered animal.